

How to give a foot massage

Learning to give a good foot massage is one of the nicest gifts you can give to your own two feet, or to those of a friend! The ultimate study in this area is called "reflexology," and is something you may want to delve into further if you wish to use foot massage as a health care treatment. This article, however, explains the basics of a general, tension relieving rub for feet. Some benefits of reflexology will happen automatically simply by virtue of massaging the soles of the feet and paying special attention to tender places, but please do not take the information here as anything other than general guidelines for helping tired feet feel better. These instructions are wonderful for achieving that!

SUPPLIES you will need are two or three big towels and some form of lubricant. Rich cream works better for a foot's tough calluses and hardened skin than hand lotion or oil, but any will work. You may wish to use one scented with eucalyptus or mint (marvelous for refreshing tired, stale feet) or ti tree oil, which is a natural disinfectant. You can make your own by mixing a couple drops of essential oil into an unscented cream.

You can find lotions, creams or oils designed for massage at a health food store or massage supply house. If hand lotion or baby oil is what you have on hand, feel free to use it, but remember that it will need to be applied more often than the products designed especially for massage.

If you are working on a friend, have their knee and foot supported while you work; a recliner chair with the foot rest up is an ideal place for the recipient, with the giver either on the floor or on a small stool in front of them.

BEGIN WITH CLEAN FEET. A foot soak with a cup of Epsom salts dissolved in a gallon of warm water is a wonderful way to de-stress before you begin the foot massage. Dry thoroughly, including between your toes.

GENTLY MASSAGE ONE FOOT completely, then do the other. Begin by massaging the cream gently into the whole foot, top and bottom, toes to ankle. End this portion with strokes going from your toes to your ankles.

WORK A LITTLE MORE DEEPLY for these next few strokes. Put both hands around your feet with your fingers on the bottom and your thumbs on the top. Move your thumbs between the tendons (those cords you feel on the top) smoothly and firmly from your ankle toward your toes. Make long strokes rather than short, jerky ones. Work with enough pressure so it's not ticklish, but not so deep it feels like a gouge.

WORK ON THE SOLES of your feet next. When you are working on yourself, this is easiest with your foot propped on the opposite knee, with a towel underneath to protect your clothing from cream. Using your thumbs, make circular motions that cover the entire surface of the bottom of your foot, moving from the base of your toes toward your heel. Keep the pressure of the circles steady and even. Use a bit more firmness on your heels; the skin here is tougher.

CONTINUE with a little firmer pressure yet, and go back over the entire surface of the sole. Give a few extra strokes to any area where you experience chronic pain--the ball of your foot, or the arch, or perhaps around your ankles. Do not dig deeply; this is supposed to be relaxing! One way to relieve cramping in the arch is to hold gentle pressure with one hand, and stretch your foot with the other, but not to the point of pain, just to muscle resistance.

MASSAGE YOUR TOES with gentle, circular motions, using a bit of a stretch while you rub. Then, give them a little exercise by rotating them. Grip all your toes together by holding them with your thumb underneath and all your fingers on top. Gently rotate them three times one direction, then three times reversed. Now rotate each one individually, gently, now, we don't want broken bones here!

SHAKE THE ENERGY loose from your own hands as you feel it building up. If this happens for you, you will be aware of it; if not, don't worry about it. Although excess energy tends to accumulate in the feet and be released by massage, not all people feel it, even among professional body workers.

TWIST the foot by rotating both hands around it, each going in opposite directions; this is reminiscent of the "Indian burn" move from grade school. To keep it feeling wonderful, you MUST use ample cream--and work gently.

FINISH the massage by repeating the all-over gentle massage you did to begin with. Keep the pressure of your strokes moving from the toes toward the ankle, continuing to work up around your ankle and all the knobs and crevices you find there.

(The reason for this directional movement is that, as we age, the skin and tissue in our feet tend to migrate toward our toes, leaving our ankles bony and without proper support. That affects our balance; we can help to prevent this by carefully moving things back the other direction.)

After the massage, wipe the soles of your feet with a towel to prevent your feet from being slippery. Slip into some wonderful heavy cotton socks or favorite (clean) slippers.

Your feet will thank you for taking the time to learn an effective way to give a foot rub!

If you have chronic foot pain that is not relieved by a thorough foot massage, or any pain that is made worse, PLEASE see your health care professional for further advice or treatment.

Written by Diana Maree